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ABSTRACT

A description is given of administrative and policy changes made in an alternative school serving delinquent students at the high school level. Previous to a reorganization of the school, and the development of a different philosophy, the school was mainly attended by students simply because they were on probation and the only alternative to school was jail. Stern discipline policies and emphasis on earning high school credits have changed the focus to one of encouraging students to return to their regular high school to complete their secondary education. (JD)

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# CABELL ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL

by Ms. Carolyn Hayford

*It is important that our students are rewarded for education. They prefer to be with us.*

The neighborhood where Cabell Alternative School is located is on a main highway. Many people drive through that neighborhood on their way to work each morning. Imagine yourself driving by and seeing great big hulking people who looked like escapees from Pruntytown or one of our child shelters sitting on the steps smoking cigarettes, and just kind of "hanging around." They would be out there for half an hour or forty-five minutes, and if you drove by the second time, you would wonder what they were doing there. If you ask questions, someone would say, "They are students of Cabell."

Sometimes they may be out in the street revving up their car engines. It is never clear when they have the hood up if they are working on the car or hot-wiring it. It could be either, because many of them are very experienced in that area.

We had a student in our school recently who went into a neighborhood funeral parlor with his brother. One of the brothers entertained the funeral director, while the other one went into the room where the young lady was laid out. There was a very valuable ring on her finger, and the student took the ring. It was never found, but we know he took it.

These are the kinds of students who are enrolled in Cabell School, but all the students are not like that. We are an alternative to the regular school situation, and the students are not dangerous.

In times past, there have been students who were enrolled in our program because they were on probation. The only way they could stay free was to promise to go to school. About a month before facing the judge, they would become hardworking creatures with perfect attendance so that we would give good evaluations about their behavior and could comment on their attitude changes. They would get a good report and their probation would either be extended or ended. Then they would not come back to school. Sometimes we did not see them again ever, because we would get word that they were incarcerated.

These are students who are troubled. Some of them are young women who got into trouble and had to drop out of school. They are not bad, they just wanted to change their lives.

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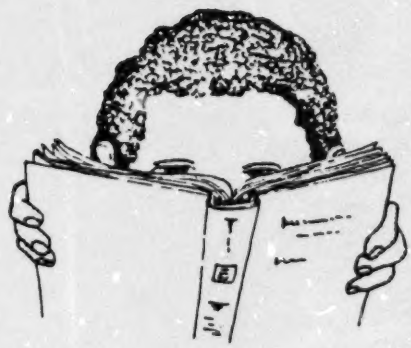
Now the environment at Cabell Alternative School has changed. Two years ago--before we organized it under its present structure--its orientation was adult vocational. It was known for its "hanging around" students.

Changes had to be made, because the school was run by two counselors who were benevolent counselors. (You have heard of benevolent dictators.) The counselors felt that the students could be changed by preaching to them. They kept the Bible on the desk, preached sermons to them, and patted them on the head. These are knife-yielding kids, and all they did was laugh.

*Their attitudes were not changed, but they could put up a good front. Something had to be done because the students were dictating the atmosphere, and no learning was taking place, or the wrong kind of learning was taking place.*

The superintendent of schools ordered the school closed because of so many neighborhood complaints. The people did not want those young men hanging around. They felt threatened, and rightly so in some cases.

Apparently, there was a secondary administrator in the county who recognized the need to have an alternative to the traditional classroom. This person went to the Board of Education and talked to the superintendent. The superintendent agreed to keep the school open if the structure of that school could be changed.



A top-notch administrator for the school was hired. He is very low-key--never gets too upset about anything until it reaches a head and then he takes action.

One of the things that had to be changed was the discipline in the school. Believe it or not, I was the teacher brought in to become the heavy hand. We had a meeting with the counselors who had been serving as disciplinarians, and with the teachers who could not function with the counselors. My role was to discipline directly through the administrators.

It was not unusual to have confrontations three or four times a day with some groups of male students. I assigned them all kinds of work. They had respect for someone who seemed to care about them, and our faculty did care. We have been lucky not to have been hit or attacked. I am not saying that it will not happen someday.

We very, very slowly changed the structure of that school. The first thing we did was to begin keeping a time sheet for the students. This time sheet had 15-minute and 5-minute blocks of time. When the students arrived at school, they signed in with their home room teacher and this became their time ticket. It was like punching a time clock. They

accounted for every minute that they were in school. There was a 10 minute break between classes to give them a chance to go smoke a cigarette or get a package of potato chips or whatever they needed between classes. But if they did not have this sheet, which was stamped and documented by their previous teacher, they could not enter the next class.

*High school credit is important to the students because if any of these students are not with us, they will be in Pruntytown, or they will be in the Dunbar Child Shelter, or incarcerated somewhere, and not allowed to go free.*

We made notes, and the students were credited only for class time. If we found that they were gossiping, playing, or doing something other than their academic work, they were docked for this time.

These students, for one reason or another, had chosen to be in our school. They had to earn the credit hours required. They did not, as in your school, have to be present a certain number of days. In our school they must put in 150 hours of classroom time, and there must be good, adequate work. They must also be able to pass the tests that we give. After 150 hours of work, they are given one year of high school credit.

Not only do they have to put in a certain number of hours, but they also have to complete a required amount of work. We have had students who have put in their time. It is very difficult to tell what is on their minds. We document the time that they spend with academics, but sometimes they fool us because they really are not doing anything. We have had students who have finished the hours, but have not finished the work.

*We established requirements and we talk about those requirements with the students. The students know that if they do not complete the work that they will not get credit for the course. This student was proud of having been made to accomplish something, and made to do it well.*

I had a confrontation early this year with a student who was a carry-over from last year. He thought that he had put on a good show, and that he had made everyone think he had done his work. I said, "Roger, you have not finished your workbook, and you cannot get credit until you finish it." He said, "I'll go to the superintendent of schools, I'll go to the principal, I'll go to the Board of Education."

I said, "You go right ahead, but I'm the teacher and I am in control. They will not give you the grade; I will give you the grade. When you have finished the task that was assigned to you, I will give you the grade."

He said, "I want my grade now. I finished my hours."

I said, "Okay, I will give you a grade now, but it will be an E." He left, but he came back on lunch hour. I figured there were about 15 hours remaining on that book. He came back and completed the work. Now he feels proud of it. Because he was made to do

something, he ended up getting a grade of B, which was probably the highest grade he had ever received in a math course. He was proud of having been made to accomplish something, and made to do it well.

We have an interesting story about some old outdated calculators that came to us by way of the State Department of Education. We got the calculators all fixed up to use in our math course. The kids loved them. They enjoyed math when they used those calculators. We did not think about locking them up; who would want them. For $10.00 a very small one that can be carried in a pocket can be bought. We do have a lot of people who need extra money and get it in a lot of different ways, but I thought no one would bother stealing the old calculators, since they were not worth anything.

We had a breaking and entering one weekend, and everything was taken out of the desk. Nothing was left except the calculators. We laughed about it, because the thieves did not want the calculators. The next weekend the thieves came back and broke out a window only big enough for a small person to crawl through. They broke out the little panels in the window, and took the calculators.

On Monday morning, we called the police. An hour later the principal got a phone call from someone offering to sell him the calculators back for $75.00. We feel sure that it was someone from within the school, but we didn't have any proof.

We do not have a lot of data on the research that we have done, but what we have done is change the atmosphere in that classroom. We discipline the students, and they report to class now.

There are about five rules that must be enforced. One of them is to stop the "hanging around." The counselors in times past have allowed the students to come into the school, take their five minutes to smoke their cigarettes, and get ready for the day. We stopped that, because the five minutes turned into 10-15-20-25 minutes. The students just never quite made it to class.

When the students are within sight of the school building, even if they are across the street, or at the end of the fence, or at the corner, they must come into the school building and report to the classroom immediately. If they do not, we turn them out; we have that option.

The students need to earn the credit, so if they are not in school, they are not earning the hours, and they do not get the credit that they want. They are rewarded for being allowed to come to school, their punishment is being sent away for some misbehavior or for breaking the rules.

One problem that the students had was returning after break. On the hour, the students are allowed to take a 10 minute break to get to the next classroom. We had a problem getting the students to return on time. The bell rings at 10 minutes after the hour, and that is the students' signal to begin moving to the classroom. When the big hand goes past the black mark at 15 after the hour, even if it is only 20 seconds past, we point this out to them. It is made clear that when that hand goes past that black mark on the clock, that they must be in their classroom.

They believe that they can talk their way into the classroom. "I had to make a phone call; I had to go to the bathroom and had to wait in line; I was smoking a cigarette and didn't quite have it finished." They could come up with all kinds of tales. We took none of that. We said you have a time limit, and you know exactly when you are to be here. We had a lot of arguments about this, but we established the rule, and they could not get by with breaking it. Now the students are back in the classroom as soon as the bell rings.

The next rule is probably the only rule we changed this year that made a difference. We have knowledge that we have a drug problem. The students are street-wise. We found that they were smoking pot, and sometimes we would even catch them with their joints. They would go off behind the building and smoke. We knew they were making sales.

They go through the county drug rehabilitation program where they are suspended for five days from the school, and they do not like that. They have to go to school at night to learn why they should not smoke pot or use drugs or do other things.

We have caught many of them behind the doors making sales. They were allowed to go to the parking lot, and this was where their drugs were stashed. They also had alcohol and they would go out and have a beer, make a quick entrance, and then come back inside. We stopped them from going to the parking lot. We felt that if we removed them from the access, that would be progress toward a solution to the problem. We closed the campus and we would not let the kids go outside the

fence. Now these were big adults, but we said that when they came inside the fence, that was it! They could not leave. If one foot was stepped outside the fence, they were gone for the day. They chanced this a few times. They would stick their foot out, and we would say goodbye.

One day a kid was out near the base and someone took his hat and threw it over the fence, and he had to go get it. I walked out there to the parking lot where he was getting his hat. I asked what he was doing out there, and he said he was going home. He knew better than to say someone had thrown his hat over the fence.

*But he is a good kid, not a bad kid. I have no idea what he did; all they want is a chance.*

We had a fellow the other day who came to school, and we still do not know what he did, but it must have been quite serious. As he walked out the door someone gave him the signal. I heard one of my students say that the police were waiting for him. But that kid did not wait. He was up and over the fence and out and gone. We have not seen hide nor hair of him since. The police are still waiting for him, and they will find him someday.

Academically, we have done wonders with these kids. I will give you a couple of statistics.

At the end of this year, we had 183 credit students; 42 of those returned to their home schools. We will begin issuing diplomas next year. We had the authority from the State Department of Education this year to issue diplomas, but so far we have not had one who was not eligible for graduation from his home school.

We have had 79 of the 183 return to their home schools. This means that they will continue in their home schools next year.

*For whatever reason they were sent to our school, there was no alternative. They can now go back to their home schools and finish their education there.*

We have a few students who are returning to Cabell Alternative School. Some of these are behavioral disorderly kids who are with us because they cannot function in the traditional classroom. Some of them are there because of drug abuse, and they must stay with us for two semesters. A few of those students will return to their home school next year.

We have had 24 dropouts, and we have had only 6 students out of this group who were dismissed. The problem usually is fighting, and we do not have very many of those. We have stopped most of it.

I could go on, I could tell you stories forever, and I could give you data on the things we have done, but

you really need to come to the school and see us. I invite all of you to visit us. Just walk in the door someday, and be there with us. Do not come dressed up, do not come as a visitor; come as yourself.

Many of you have come to our picnic. We are getting quite a reputation, because we work in public relations. We want a lot of people to come into our school. The first year that we were there we hosted a luncheon. Can you imagine having dinner for 200 people in a building where there is no kitchen? We do have a sink in the room where we serve the lunch. We have no kitchen, no stove, nothing, and yet we take everyone. It has been established as a yearly event, and we really enjoy it. The kids participate in it. They go through the lines with our guests.

There are so many things that we do for them that I cannot begin to tell you about all of them. But what I wanted to do today was to tell you that we are here in Kanawha County. We invite you to come and talk to us about what we do. We care about these kids, and I think that is the key to the things that we have been able to do.

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